Contra Costa County Historical Society

BULLETIN

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John Muir House Superintendent to Speak June 1

It stands alone on the hill. Proud, oblivious of time, and more popular than ever.

On April 30, more than 1,000 visitors gathered at John Muir's old home in Martinez to help celebrate the venerable structure's 140th birthday. On June 1, members of the Society will have an opportunity to hear an up-date on the home, its restoration and future plans when Superintendent Doris I. Omundson addresses the next dinner meeting.

The program, which includes no-host cocktails at 7 p.m. and dinner at 7:30 p.m., will be held at the Concord Inn, Willow Pass Road and Hotel Way, Concord. Justice A. F. Bray, president, will preside.

Declared a national historic site by Congress in 1964, the Muir buildings and grounds are being restored to their appearance between 1906 and 1914. The exterior of the home is now historically accurate, and the 8¾ acres of land have been restored as a miniature of the orchards and vineyards that once comprised the 2,600 acre ranch. Also located on the premises is the old Vincente Martinez adobe. Plans to reconstruct windmills and other historic structures are underway by the National Park Service which administers the historic site.

Mrs. Omundson will add many anecdotes and bits of information about the Muir family, the house that was once their home, and the visitors who come by the hundreds to see where the "father of the National Park System" once lived, worked and fought to preserve America's forest.

Doris (Mrs. John) I. Omundson

Guest Speaker

Mrs. Doris I. Omundson, Superintendent of the John Muir National Historic site since January, 1973 has served 11 years with the National Park Service. A native of Kalispell, Montana, she's been a resident of California since 1960 and now lives at Pt. Reyes Station.

The Park Service executive attended Seattle Pacific College, College of Marin and Cal State at Sonoma. Before her assignment to the John Muir House, Mrs. Omundson was a park technician at Point Reyes National Seashore and chief park naturalist, Muir Woods National Monument. She has two grown children and a brand new granddaughter. Our guest speaker is a member of Soroptimist International of Martinez, Marin Toastmistress Club, Western Interpreters Association and the John Muir Memorial Association.

John Muir in Contra Costa

A native of Scotland (born April 21, 1838), John Muir saw much of the world before he settled down to domestic life in Alhambra Valley. Emigrating to America with his family when he was 11, Muir began his wilderness excursions and conservationist writings as a young man.

In 1880 he married Louise Strentzel, daughter of John and Louisiana Strentzel. An immigrant from Poland, Strentzel came to California in 1849 and eventually settled near Martinez. A physician, Strentzel also became a noted horticulturist and landowner in Alhambra Valley.

Two years after Muir's marriage, the Strentzels gave their daughter and son-in-law their original ranchhouse and built a new and larger home nearby. On Dr. Strentzel's death in 1890, the Muirs moved into the "big house."

Muir grew prosperous as a fruitgrower on the rich land. Here he and his wife and two daughters, Wanda and Helen, enjoyed their ranch life. Here, too, Muir wrote many of the articles and books on conservation and natural history that brought him to the attention of world renowned scientists — and politicians. From the time he moved into the Muir House in 1890 until his death in 1914, Muir worked ceaselessly to bring about legislation that would save America's forests.

Restored and refurbished kitchen of the John Muir House

During these Contra Costa years he wrote his first book, "The Mountains of California." Published in 1894 it aroused public sentiment for conservation. In 1903 Muir accompanied President Theodore Roosevelt on a tour of Yosemite. It was on this trip that he convinced Roosevelt that conservation could only be achieved through a system of national parks and forests.

Muir's efforts during his years as a Contra Costa citizen were instrumental in establishing the U.S. Forest Service, Yosemite National Park, Sequoia National Park, Mount Rainier National Park, Petrified Forest National Monument and a part of Grand Canyon National Monument.

The John Muir House, John Muir National Historic Site

Visiting the Muir House

The John Muir house and grounds are open daily except on Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Tours are self guiding, but guided tours for groups may be arranged in advance. A film about John Muir's life and philosophy is shown hourly.

For further information, call Mrs. Omundson at 228-8860 or write John Muir National Historic Site, 4202 Alhambra Avenue, Martinez, CA 94553.

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees."

John Muir

Assembly Okays Marsh Mansion Funds

News of another famous house — the John Marsh Mansion — was reported out of Sacramento last month. On a 68-0 vote, the Assembly approved a bill that allocated $1.5 million in state park funds for the restoration of the Marsh home near Brentwood and for development of an adjacent park.

The bill, which was authored by Assembly Ways and Means Chairman Dan Boatwright, D-Concord, must next clear the Senate. Under his bill, the historic home, would be rebuilt and the 5½ acre site developed. In addition, the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District would be required to open the Marsh Creek Reservoir for public fishing.

The state would develop an Indian artifact museum on seven acres of adjacent meadowland which the S.H. Cowell Foundation has offered. Boatwright's legislation calls for the State Parks Department to operate the home for the first five year period and then turn it over to the county or other local government agency willing to operate and maintain the project.

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MEMBERSHIP MEETING
Dinner and Program

Speaker: Doris I. Omundson, Superintendent, John Muir National Historic Site, Martinez

Date: Thursday, June 1, 1978

Place: Concord Inn
Willow Pass Road and Hotel Way, Concord

Time: 7:00 p.m. No-host cocktails
7:30 p.m. Dinner $8.00

Reservations: J.B. Jory, Secretary
P.O. Box 190
Martinez, CA 94553
Phone: 228-4534

COME ONE! COME ALL!